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SUBJECT: POLAND AS UKRAINE'S ADVOCATE

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Ukrainian officials regard Poland as a strong bilateral partner, Ukraine's primary advocate in the European Union, and as a key supporter of Ukraine's NATO aspirations. Poland and Ukraine maintain close contacts at all levels: Presidential, Prime Ministerial and via their Foreign Ministries. This close relationship has allowed Kyiv and Warsaw to work out border issues and to take on the challenge of co-hosting the EURO 2012 European soccer championships.
End Summary.

LEADERS IN SYNC

¶2. (C) President Yushchenko enjoys a close relationship with Polish President Kaczynski. Ukrainian MFA Poland Desk Officer Oleksiy Platonov told us that in addition to the eleven official bilateral meeting between Yushchenko and Kaczynski in the last year, the presidents also hold frequent unofficial phone calls without the involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) or presidential staff. He said that the relationship between Yushchenko and Kaczynski extends beyond similar policy and world views and that their families are close friends. Platonov said that one unfortunate side effect of the Yushchenko-Kaczynski relationship was that the MFA was often left out of the loop because many high level discussions happen informally.

¶3. (C) Although not as close as Yushchenko and Kaczynski, Prime Minister Tymoshenko and Polish PM Tusk are also in frequent contact and enjoy a good working relationship. Bogoslaw Gertruda from the Polish Embassy in Kyiv told us that Tusk sees Tymoshenko as an action-oriented leader who can get things done. The two governments have created a bilateral commission including more than 17 subcommissions focused on specific topics, such as extending the Odesa-Brody oil pipeline, trade, investment, electricity, and cemeteries.

In December 2008 the Ukrainian and Polish MFAs held a ministry to ministry forum with ten directors from each side discussing a broad swath of bilateral topics. Serhiy Mishchenko, MFA Director for Central Europe, commented to us that this meeting underscored the depth and institutional nature of Ukrainian-Polish cooperation.

UKRAINE'S EUROPEAN ADVOCATE

¶4. (C) Ukrainian leaders regard Poland as a strong advocate for Ukraine's integration into the European Union and NATO. Platonov said that only Poland is willing to stand up to other EU countries on Ukraine's behalf, especially when it involves Russia. He said that Kyiv sees Poland as its primary champion for EU membership and as second only to the

US as an advocate for Ukrainian accession to NATO. Platonov said that the shared history of Poland and Ukraine of "war and subjugation" made their leaders see the world through similar optics.

¶5. (C) Warsaw is committed to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration not only because Kyiv is a close ally, but because it is good for Poland's economy and national security, according to Gertruda. He said that the biggest external roadblocks to closer ties between Ukraine and the EU were the close relations Germany and France maintain with Russia. Gertruda lamented that "Ukraine is its own worst enemy" when it comes to Euro-Atlantic integration. Political infighting and "undemocratic" actions by its leaders frequently undermine Polish advocacy on Ukraine's behalf and give ample ammunition to Kyiv's harshest critics.

WORKING TOGETHER ON BORDER AGREEMENT AND VISAS

¶6. (C) After Poland's December 2007 entry into the EU Schengen visa zone, Ukrainians lost access to easily obtained free Polish visas, according to Gertruda. This was especially difficult for Ukrainian residents living near the Polish border who often depended on shuttle trading or who have family living on the Polish side of the border. Although, Ukrainians now have to meet more stringent standards and pay 60 Euros for a Schengen zone visa, the Polish visa process is considered the most "humane" of the EU countries, according to Platonov. Poland is committed to easing the EU visa process for Ukrainians, according to

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Gertruda, and is pushing for simplifying Schengen visa requirements for certain Ukrainians, such as businessmen and students. Gertruda told us that in addition to their consulates in Kyiv, Lviv, and Kharkiv, Poland had broken ground on a new consulate in Vinnitsya and is moving forward with opening a consulate in Sevastopol, making it the first EU country to open a consulate in Crimea.

¶7. (C) The Polish parliament recently forwarded to President Kaczynski an agreement to allow visa free travel for residents in a 30km buffer zone on either side of the Ukrainian-Polish border. Gertruda said that Ukraine had been pushing for the zone to be extended to 50km to include the city of Lviv, but that Poland had been unable to overcome European Commission (EC) opposition to modify the 30km EU standard. He said Yushchenko and Kaczynski decided to move forward with the initial 30km agreement to improve the situation immediately, but to continue to push for special EC approval to extend the border zone. After Kaczynski's expected signature and European Commission ratification, Ukrainians can receive documentation from Poland that will allow them visa free access across the Polish border, according to Gertruda. He said that close cooperation between Kyiv and Warsaw had enabled the border agreement to progress quickly, in contrast to Ukraine's stalled border agreement with Romania.

CO-HOSTING EURO 2012

¶8. (SBU) The joint bid of Ukraine and Poland to hold the Euro 2012 European soccer championships highlights the close cooperation between the two countries, according to Platonov. Gertruda said that PMs Tusk and Tymoshenko have set up a EURO 2012 bilateral working group to focus on coordinating cross border infrastructure projects and to work out venue changes if any of the host cities fall behind on their pledged construction. Although the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), European soccer's governing body, has publicly warned Ukraine and Poland that delays in the construction of stadiums, hotels, and infrastructure

could result in the championship being moved to a new host, Gertruda said that UEFA's most recent private assessments showed Ukraine and Poland were "on target" to meet construction deadlines.

COMMENT

19. (C) The close and productive bilateral relationship between Poland and Ukraine is a significant example of historical reconciliation. Poland has managed to help mentor Ukraine without prompting notable resentment. While Yushchenko's political popularity is at an all-time low and his remaining time in office likely measured in months, we judge the bilateral ties forged at all levels to be deep enough and institutional enough to endure.

TAYLOR